

What is a County Personnel Policy?
By Lisa Robertson, County Administrator
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Since 1995 employees of Madison County have been subject to personnel regulations that prescribe the terms and conditions of their employment. Recently, at the direction of the Board of Supervisors, the County Administrator and Department Heads recommended an updated Personnel Policy to the Board. On June 9, 2009 the Board of Supervisors, in a 4-1 vote, approved the updated Policy.

The 1995 Regulations (last revised in 1998) applied to “all employees of the County under the Supervision of the County Administrator.” Likewise, the 2009 Personnel Policy continues the Board of Supervisors’ long-standing written policy of delegating day-to-day personnel administration to a chief administrative officer (the County Administrator) and of authorizing that administrative officer to utilize other County officers (for example, the Finance Director) to assist with such tasks as payroll administration; health and retirement benefits administration; compliance with federal laws such as the Fair Labor Standards Act, the Family and Medical Leave Act, HIPAA, privacy protection laws, personnel evaluations and grievances, record-keeping and reporting requirements, etc. Even with a relatively small workforce, the day-to-day requirements associated with personnel administration (including hiring and firing full- and part-time employees) had become increasingly complex and not well-suited to being performed by a governing board that meets only a couple of times per month.

Every county with more than 15 employees is required by state law to establish a “personnel system.” Virginia Code 15.2-1506. A “personnel system” consists of rules and regulations that provide for the general administration of personnel matters, a classification plan for employees, a uniform pay plan, and a procedure for resolving grievances of employees. Va. Code 15.2-1506. The very purpose of having an established personnel system, including written rules, regulations and policies, is to provide systematic and impartial procedures for hiring, retaining and managing a competent work force.

Until the 2009 Personnel Policy was adopted by the Board, one significant omission in the 1995 Personnel Policy was a written procedure establishing fair and objective procedures for recruiting and selecting individuals for County job positions. The 2009 Policy contains, for the first time, a section entitled “Appointments & Separations”, which identifies uniform procedures for hiring and promoting employees. This new section has been established in order to promote the County’s obligations to be an equal opportunity employer, and also to carry out the 2005 recommendations of the County’s Financial Auditor (Robinson Farmer, Cox, Associates) that “*a clear chain of command should be established and enforced. Department supervisors should be responsible for recruiting, hiring, supervising and evaluating employees within their departments.*” This administrative structure has become the standard among Virginia’s counties and ensures accountability of all public officials. Indeed, in Chapter 5 of the Virginia County Supervisors’ Manual (7th Edition, published by the Virginia Association of Counties) Board of Supervisors’ members are informed that “*In most counties, personnel decisions have been delegated to the chief administrator. The primary responsibility of the board of supervisors in personnel matters is to establish policies to guide the actions of the chief administrator and department heads.*”

I hope this information will help dispense with some of the misperceptions recently reported in our local newspaper. It goes without saying that the elected Board of Supervisors is ultimately responsible for compliance with the various federal and state requirements that affect the administration of a personnel system, including the hiring and firing of employees; however, as indicated by VACO, that responsibility can most efficiently and successfully be met by establishing clear written policies to direct the actions of County administrative officers.